

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8138
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 2526

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ES
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE WITH GOVERNMENT OF EL SALVADOR

REF: SAN SALVADOR 2492

1. IN THE WAKE OF THE VISIT HERE BY DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARIES SALLY SHLETON AND MARK SCHNEIDER, I HAVE BEEN APPROACHED BY VARIOUS PEOPLE INCLUDING VICE PRESIDENT ASTACIO, MINISTER OF PLANNING REYES, AND GENERAL ROSALES, ALL WONDERING WHAT I COULD TELL THEM ABOUT THE NET IMPACT OF LOCAL TALKS AND OBSERVATIONS UPON THE TWO VISITORS. IN ALL SUCH CASES, I HAVE TRIED TO GET ACROSS THE IDEAN THAT THE VISIT BROUGHT OUT THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF EL SALVADOR CAN AND SHOULD TAKE POSITIVE STEPS TO IMPROVE ITS RECORD AND ITS IMAGE IN THE MATTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

2. ON A RECENT SOCIAL OCCASION, MINISTER OF JUSTICE FLORES
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Y FLORES VOICED A SIMILAR INQUIRY. STANDING WITH HIM WAS MINISTER OF LABOR ESCOBAR GARCIA, A PAST AND POSSIBLY FUTURE CONTENDER FOR PRESIDENTIAL STATUS IN THIS COUNTRY. BY THEN, I WAS IN A POSITION TO SPEAK ALSO UPON THE DEFINITE USG ATTITUDE TOWARD THE TWO LOANS COMING UP LAST WEEK FOR IBRD CONSIDERATION AND THE CATTLE DEVELOPMENT AND ANIMAL HEALTH LOAN TO BE VOTED UPON IN THE FUTURE BY THE IDB.

3. IN A RATHER FULL TREATMENT, I WARMED TO THE SUBJECT AND VOLUNTEERED THE VIEW THAT THE GOES IMAGE ABROAD IS SAGGING RATHER BADLY. PUBLICITY ABOUT EVENTS OCCURRING IN EL SALVADOR IS TENDING TO ALIENATE WORLD OPINION. BY DISMISSING THIS AS THE WORK OF AN EVIL CABAL CONSISTING OF COMMUNISM, OPPOSITION, CATHOLIC CHURCH ACTIVISTS AND HOSTILE INTERNATIONAL PRESS, THE GOES WAS BLINDING ITSELF TO REALITY AND LOSING BY DEFAULT A BATTLE IN WHICH IT STILL HAD POSITIVE MOVES AVAILABLE TO IT. BOTH MINISTERS LISTENED CLOSELY AND ASKED OCCASIONAL QUESTIONS.

4. WHEN THEY INVITED MY THOUGHTS AS TO WHAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD DO, I REPLIED THAT THIS WAS A LONG AND INVOLVED MATTER WHICH I WAS BEING INVITED TO TAKE UP WITH THE VICE PRESIDENT AND THE MINISTERS OF INTERIOR AND PLANNING. CLOSE TO THEIR OWN FIELD OF COMPETENCE, HOWEVER, I MADE REFERENCE TO THE MUCH-MALIGNED LAW FOR THE DEFENSE OF PUBLIC ORDER. I SAID THAT I WAS WELL AWARE OF THE TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THAT LAW HAD COME INTO BEING, BUT THAT EVER SINCE THEN IT HAD CONSISTENTLY BEEN ATTACKED BY ALL PARTIES OF THE OPPOSITION, BY THE CHURCH, BY GROUPS OF THE EXTREME LEFT, AND BY SOME INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS AS BEING WEIGHTED TOO HEAVILY IN THE DIRECTION OF REPRESSION AND DENIAL
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OF HUMAN RIGHTS. AS AN ACT OF MAGNANIMITY IF NOT SIMPLE JUSTICE, I SUGGESTED, THE GOES MIGHT WISH TO CONSIDER INVITING IN CRITICS OF THE LAW AND INVITING THEIR REASONED DISCUSSION OF IT WITH ANY EYE TO FINDING A FORMULA FOR RETAINING ESSENTIAL AND LEGITIMATE ASPECTS WHILE GETTING RID OF ONES OFFENSIVE ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS. RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL LEADERS, I SAID, COULD COOPERATE IN GOOD FAITH IN SUCH AN ENDEAVOR, WHEREAS THOSE NOT SINCERELY INTERESTED IN LEGITIMATE DEFENSE OF SOCIETY AND PUBLIC ORDER THROUGH ACCEPTABLE MEANS WOULD STAND ISOLATED AND REVEALED. THROUGH AMENDMENT OR IMPLEMENTING REGULATION, I SUGGESTED, THE LAW MIGHT BECOME A CONSENSUS DOCUMENT RATHER THAN CONTINUING TO BE VIEWED AND RESENTED AS A UNILATERAL IMPOSITION. I SAID THAT THERE WERE OTHER SIMILARLY LOGICAL MOVES ON THE PART OF THE GOES WHICH I HOPED TO BE DISCUSSING IN THE DAYS AHEAD.

4. THE REACTION OF THE TWO MINISTERS WAS INTERESTING. THEY LISTENED INTENTLY TO THE PRESENTATION, THANKED ME VERY SINCERELY AND WARMLY WHEN I HAD FINISHED, ASSURED ME THAT THERE WAS NO RESENTMENT OR HARD FEELINGS ON THEIR PART, AND URGED THAT I SPEAK SIMILARLY TO OTHER

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET. IT WAS IMPORTANT, THEY SAID,
THAT THE TRUE DIMENSTIONS OF FOREIGN REACTION BE HEARD
FROM THE MOUTH OF SOMEONE THEY TRUSTED AND WHOM THEY KNEW
TO BE SERIOUSLY AND SYMPATHETICALLY CONCERNED FOR THE
COURSE OF FUTURE EVENTS IN EL SALVADOR. INCLOSING, THEY
REQUESTED ME TO LET THEM ARRANGE FUTURE OCCASIONS FOR SIMILAR
INFORMAL PRESENTATIONS, SAYING THAT IT WOULD BE INFINITELY
BETTER TO DO THIS IN SMALL GROUPS RATHER THAN WITH THE
CABINET AS A WHOLE. I SAID I WOULD BE GLAD TO DO SO IF
THEY THOUGHT IT WOULD BE USEFUL.
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